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SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, MR. DUNSTAN, OPENING FEDERATION OF  
AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY STAFF ASSOCIATIONS ANNUAL CONFERENCE.  
FLINDERS UNIVERSITY.

22.8.73

PROFESSOR WENDALL-SMITH, MR. SMITH, DELEGATES:

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR ASKING ME TO OPEN YOUR ANNUAL CONFERENCE.

THE SKILLS AND QUALIFICATIONS OF THE AUSTRALIAN WORKFORCE ARE INCREASING ALL THE TIME. BUT THIS IS DEFINITELY THE MOST ERUDITE TRADE UNION GROUP I EXPECT TO ADDRESS THIS YEAR.

IT IS ALSO, AS YOUR LENGTHY AGENDA INDICATES, AN EXTREMELY IMPORTANT CONFERENCE FOR YOUR MEMBERS, NOT ONLY BECAUSE OF THE PERENNIAL (AND TO THEM NOT UNIMPORTANT) MATTERS OF SALARIES AND CONDITIONS BUT BECAUSE OF THE WIDER QUESTIONS INCREASINGLY BEING RAISED IN

2.

AUSTRALIA ABOUT UNIVERSITY EDUCATION.

THERE ARE, IT SEEMS TO ME, A NUMBER OF IRONIES WHICH BECOME APPARENT WHEN ONE CONSIDERS THE PLACE OF THE UNIVERSITY IN THE AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITY OF THE 1970'S.

FIRSTLY AT A TIME WHEN, WITHIN THE UNIVERSITIES, THERE RAGES A DEBATE ABOUT WHETHER THEY SHOULD BE CLOISTERS OF LEARNING AND RESEARCH OR ENGINES OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND EVEN REVOLUTION. THERE IS A GROWING DISSATISFACTION ABOUT WHETHER THE GRADUATES PRODUCED ARE THOSE THE SOCIETY NEEDS.

SECONDLY, AT A TIME WHEN OUR UNIVERSITIES THEMSELVES - WHETHER REFORMIST, REVOLUTIONARY OR CLOISTER ORIENTED - EVER MORE RESEMBLE TUITION FACTORIES THERE IS INCREASING CRITICISM OF ELITISM AMONG STAFF AND GRADUATES.

THE QUICK AND FLIPPANT RESPONSE WOULD BE THAT THIS INDICATES THE NEED FOR THE UNIVERSITIES TO GET THEMSELVES NEW P.R.'S AND GO IN FOR SOME RAPID IMAGE CHANGING.

THE PROBLEM IS, HOWEVER, FAR MORE SERIOUS AND I BELIEVE IT IS ONE WHICH DEMANDS A DEEP STUDY OF THE ROLE OF THE UNIVERSITY, AND RIGOROUS QUESTIONING OF ITS VALUES, METHODS AND OBJECTIVES.

THE ITEMS YOU HAVE LISTED FOR DISCUSSION SHOW THAT YOU ARE ALIVE TO THIS NEED AND PLAINLY YOUR DELIBERATIONS WILL BE VERY IMPORTANT IN FINDING THE ANSWERS, AND HOPEFULLY, THE SOLUTIONS.

STATE GOVERNMENTS NO LONGER HAVE FINANCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THIS FIELD BUT WE REMAIN, OF COURSE, VITALLY INTERESTED AS ALL UNIVERSITIES ARE CONSTITUTED UNDER STATE LAW. SO, I HOPE YOU'LL

FORGIVE THE PRESUMPTION IF I LIST A FEW OF THE PROBLEMS WHICH I THINK SHOULD CONCERN YOU, THE GOVERNING COUNCILS AND ALL THOSE INVOLVED IN FRAMING UNIVERSITY POLICY. THEY ARE NOT NEW, BUT THEY ARE TAKING ON NEW URGENCY.

PERHAPS THE MOST URGENT IS THE NEED FOR MUCH MORE IMPROVED AND SCIENTIFIC FORWARD PLANNING.

WE ARE AT PRESENT IN THE ABSURD SITUATION WHERE WE ARE PRODUCING A GLUT OF SOME SPECIALISTS WHILE WE FACE AN ACUTE SHORTAGE OF OTHERS, NOTABLY SOCIOLOGISTS AND SOCIAL WORKERS. ADMITTEDLY, THE KIND OF FORWARD PLANNING REQUIRED HERE IS EXTRAORDINARILY COMPLEX, THE VARIABLES ARE MANY BECAUSE OF THE TIME SCALE INVOLVED AND THE PACE OF CHANGE IN AUSTRALIAN SOCIETY. BUT THE NEED TO FIND A BETTER WAY OF PLANNING IS ACUTE. THERE IS A PRESSING NEED FOR

GREATER CO-ORDINATION IN ACHIEVING A REASONABLY ORDERED DEVELOPMENT OF ASIAN LANGUAGE STUDIES AND IN AVOIDING UNNECESSARY OVERLAPPING AND DUPLICATION OF ACTIVITIES BETWEEN INSTITUTIONS. IT IS HOPED THAT IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA THE NEWLY ESTABLISHED COUNCIL FOR EDUCATIONAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH WILL BE ABLE TO CARRY OUT THIS ROLE IN A CONSTRUCTIVE MANNER.

ANOTHER PROBLEM WHICH I BELIEVE UNIVERSITY STAFFS MUST FACE IS THE RESENTMENT WHICH GRADUATES OFTEN MEET WHEN THEY GO TO WORK. SOME OF THIS IS INEVITABLE. PEOPLE WHO HAVEN'T HAD THE SAME OPPORTUNITIES CAN NATURALLY BE SUSPICIOUS AND UNWELCOMING TO NEWCOMERS WHO MAY SOON LEAP OVER THEM FINANCIALLY AND IN STATUS.

BUT, QUITE FRANKLY, I DO THINK A LOT OF GRADUATES BRING THIS ON THEMSELVES THROUGH AN ELITIST AND SOMETIMES DOWNRIGHT ARROGANT ATTITUDE. UNIVERSITIES WOULD SERVE THEIR STUDENTS WELL IF, IN ADDITION TO GIVING AN ACADEMIC TRAINING AND PROVIDING THEM WITH THE LEISURE AND OPPORTUNITY FOR CRITICAL THINKING, SOME ATTEMPT AT WHAT CAN ROUGHLY BE DEFINED AS "COMMUNITY ORIENTATION" WAS UNDERTAKEN. AT PRESENT IT SEEMS THAT THE ANNUAL ENCOUNTER BETWEEN GRADUATE AND NON-GRADUATE IS MARKED BY A QUITE UNNECESSARY AMOUNT OF CULTURE SHOCK.

AGAIN THIS RAISES VERY LARGE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES TO WHICH THERE ARE NO QUICK AND EASY ANSWERS. BUT, IF AUSTRALIA IS TRULY TO BECOME THE CLASSLESS SOCIETY WE SOMETIMES CLAIM IT IS, THEN SOMETHING HAS TO BE DONE.

A THIRD, MORE SPECIFIC PROBLEM THAT MUST BE CONSIDERED IS THE WHOLE QUESTION OF UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE. AT PRESENT WE ARE STILL LARGELY LOCKED INTO THE MATRICULATION SYSTEM.

FOR EXAMPLE, IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA THERE WERE 3,132 STUDENTS IN SECOND YEAR IN 1949 BUT ONLY 145 WENT INTO FIFTH YEAR IN 1952, OR 4½%. BY COMPARISON, TWENTY YEARS LATER, OF 18,936 SECOND YEAR STUDENTS IN 1969, 5,859 STAYED TO UNDERTAKE A FIFTH YEAR IN 1972, OR 31½% - A DRAMATIC INCREASE BOTH PROPORTIONATELY AND ABSOLUTELY.

THE REASONS ARE WELL KNOWN - THE PRESSURE ON TERTIARY EDUCATION PLACES OF ALL KINDS, AND EMPLOYER DEMANDS FOR MATRICULATION CERTIFICATES.

IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA WE ARE INCREASINGLY CRITICAL OF THIS AND ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING ALTERNATIVES TO PUBLIC EXAMINATIONS.

WHATEVER THE MERITS OF A MATRICULATION COURSE, IT IS BY DEFINITION GEARED TOWARDS UNIVERSITY ENTRANCE AND MAY BE OF LITTLE USE TO THE PUPIL WHO DOES NOT INTEND TO GO TO UNIVERSITY OR DOES NOT GET THERE. THIS IS A PROBLEM FOR THOSE CONCERNED WITH SECONDARY AND TERTIARY EDUCATION AND FOR EMPLOYERS. AND IT IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM. MY VIEW IS THAT THERE COULD BE CONSIDERABLE IMPROVEMENTS IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION OVERALL IF THE PRESENT SYSTEM WAS REPLACED BY ONE OF ACCREDITATION OR SOMETHING SIMILAR, AND HERE THE UNIVERSITIES COULD PLAY A LEADING PART.

CERTAINLY UNIVERSITIES MUST RECOGNISE THE PROBLEMS THAT THE CURRENT SYSTEM CREATES, SUCH AS: EMPLOYER DISCRIMINATION AGAINST STUDENTS DOING INTERNAL COURSES, A CURRICULUM STRAIGHT JACKET ON COURSES

IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN CIRCUMSTANCES WHERE A SIGNIFICANT PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS ARE UNDERTAKING MATRICULATION, PERHAPS A SIGNIFICANT MAJORITY, ARE NOT LIKELY TO CONTINUE TO A UNIVERSITY OR COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION. AS RETENTION INTO SENIOR SECONDARY YEARS INCREASES, THESE PROBLEMS WILL INTENSIFY UNLESS THE SYSTEM IS CHANGED. IT IS NO LONGER POSSIBLE FOR UNIVERSITIES TO IGNORE THE NEED FOR CHANGE IN THIS AREA.

THIS LEADS TO THE FOURTH POINT I'D LIKE TO MAKE TODAY - ONE THAT RAISES MORE PROBLEMS BUT WHICH ALSO OFFERS SOME SOLUTION.

I BELIEVE THERE MUST BE MORE PROVISION IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITY EDUCATION FOR THE CONFERRING OF EXTRA-MURAL DEGREES AND THE ADMISSION OF MATURE AGE STUDENTS.

THE AUSTRALIAN LABOR PARTY HAS ACCEPTED THIS IN ITS OPEN UNIVERSITY POLICY AND THE FEDERAL EDUCATION MINISTER, MR. BEAZLEY, HAS APPOINTED A DISTINGUISHED COMMITTEE TO ENQUIRE INTO IT. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY POSSIBLY USING A MULTI-MEDIA APPROACH AND REGIONAL RESOURCE CENTRES COULD BE A POWERFUL FACTOR, PARTICULARLY IF COMBINED WITH A SYSTEM OF MATURE AGE ENTRANCE EXEMPTION, IN BREAKING DOWN THE ELITIST CRITICISM I SPOKE OF EARLIER. FAR MORE IMPORTANTLY IT WOULD OFFER MANY THOUSANDS OF AUSTRALIANS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR INTELLECTUAL ENRICHMENT AT PRESENT DENIED THEM. JUST AS I - AND I'M SURE YOU - BELIEVE THERE'S MORE TO SECONDARY EDUCATION THAN A MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE, SO DO I BELIEVE - AND AGAIN I'M SURE YOU'LL AGREE - THAT UNIVERSITIES HAVE MORE TO OFFER THAN A DEGREE. IT IS ABSURD THAT A COUNTRY AS RESTRICTED IN SO MANY WAYS AS SOUTH AFRICA SHOULD HAVE ESTABLISHED, WELL AHEAD OF US, AN EFFICIENT SYSTEM OF UNIVERSITY

CORRESPONDENCE EDUCATION - MUCH AS ONE MAY QUESTION SOME OF THE QUAINTER ASPECTS OF THE CURRICULA. I AM DELIGHTED TO SEE THAT YOUR CONFERENCE WILL BE DISCUSSING THE MATTER OF AN OPEN UNIVERSITY AND CONSIDERING A REPORT ON IT.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN, AS THIS IS AN ACADEMIC GATHERING, I HAVE SOUGHT IN ACADEMIC STYLE TO OUTLINE A FEW PROBLEMS AND RAISE SOME QUESTIONS HOPING THAT MY AUDITORS MAY BE STIMULATED OR INCENSED INTO THINKING ABOUT THE ANSWERS. CERTAINLY NO GATHERING IS BETTER EQUIPPED TO DO SO.

I HAVE VERY MUCH PLEASURE IN OFFICIALLY DECLARING YOUR CONFERENCE OPEN.

THANK YOU.